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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LJUBLJANA 000542

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/11/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [SI](#)
SUBJECT: SLOVENIA'S NEW DEFMIN LOOKING FOR NATO NICHES TO
FILL

REF: LJUBLJANA 537

Classified By: Ambassador Yousif B. Ghafari, reasons 1.4(b,d)

Summary

1. (C) In a December 9 meeting with the Ambassador, new Defense Minister Ljubica Jelusic stressed both the importance of U.S. support and training for Slovenia's armed forces and the need for Slovenia to develop niche capabilities within NATO. She confirmed that Slovenia would likely withdraw its two instructors from Iraq at the end of December, rather than in February, to coincide with the expiration of UNSC resolution 1790. She emphasized that the move would not change Slovenia's firm commitment to its missions in Afghanistan and Kosovo. Acknowledging the effect of political and financial constraints on the defense budget, Jelusic outlined Slovenia's priority as "concentrating and specializing" in areas where the Slovenian Armed Force (SAF) can contribute most effectively to NATO. She highlighted the examples of Slovenia's work in the western Balkans and also requested U.S. support for development of a mountain warfare Center of Excellence. End Summary.

Strengthening U.S. - Slovenia Partnership

2. (C) During their first official meeting, Defense Minister Ljubica Jelusic thanked Ambassador Ghafari for U.S. training for Slovenia's officers. She noted the importance of the IMET program, citing the training of an average of 100 Slovene officers each year. Jelusic, an academic, stressed the importance of academic exchanges and mentioned that Professor Charlie Moskos, a Northwestern University military sociologist, had paved the way for U.S.-Slovene military cooperation while teaching here in Slovenia. She expressed Slovenia's desire that such "double track" cooperation--operational and educational--remain a foundation of U.S.-Slovenia relations.

3. (C) Ambassador Ghafari noted that, along with world-class training opportunities, the U.S. can supply SAF with the best equipment. He emphasized that the process needs to be transparent and that U.S. companies are ready to bid on Slovene defense tenders, referencing recent discussions about Humvees and aircraft.

NATO Missions

4. (C) Jelusic echoed FM Zbogar's comments (reftel) about the timing of Slovenia's withdrawal of its two instructors from the NATO Training Mission in Iraq (NTM-I). Ambassador Ghafari acknowledged the political pressure for withdrawal in December, but urged Jelusic to keep the instructors in Iraq as long as possible. She responded that both parliament and

the public saw the December 31 expiration of UNSC Resolution 1790 as the deadline for a withdrawal, rather than February 2009, when the current rotation is scheduled to end. While the government technically has the final say in troop deployments, Jelusic explained that the new government recognizes parliament's frustration at being excluded from the discussions about Slovenian troop deployments to Iraq, Chad, and Lebanon.

15. (C) Responding to Ambassador Ghafari's emphasis on continuing commitments in Afghanistan, Jelusic stressed that Slovenia would continue to meet its obligations in Afghanistan and Kosovo, even as a lower defense budget required "shrinking our appetites." In order to meet those commitments, she said Slovenia would focus on "concentration and specialization." She explained that Slovenia's "knowledge and expertise" gained in Afghanistan could be useful in future NATO missions; and as the western Balkans become more peaceful, Slovenia would look at supporting missions in the Middle East and elsewhere. She expressed concern that the U.S. remain engaged in Kosovo because the EU alone could not complete the mission.

Request U.S. Support for Mountain Training

16. (C) Jelusic highlighted developing Slovenia's Mountain Warfare School as the centerpiece of Slovenia's focus on specialization. Slovenia is preparing the school to become a NATO Center of Excellence (COE) (septel), and Jelusic said that "U.S. support is key" to this effort. She explained that Slovenia's "capabilities and culture" make the proposed

LJUBLJANA 00000542 002 OF 002

Center of Excellence a perfect "niche to support our alliance partners."

Jewel in the Crown

17. (U) Jelusic also expressed Slovenia's pride in the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victim Assistance (ITF), citing it as an example of Slovenia's regional efforts. She thanked Ambassador Ghafari for U.S. support, noting that the U.S. is ITF's biggest donor and encourages other donations with its matching program.

Comment

18. (C) Defense Minister Jelusic's openness and desire to work with the U.S. set a high bar for our future cooperation. She highly values IMET and other exchange programs, and displayed her familiarity with them by inquiring specifically about the 3 U.S. officers who studied in a master's degree program in Slovenia. She explained that, despite our push to keep Slovenia's two instructors in Iraq, the political reality in Slovenia made that impossible. However, she conveyed resolve to keep Slovenia engaged in Afghanistan. As Slovenia looks for niches to fill in NATO, we will have opportunities to engage Jelusic and promote U.S. support, expertise, and equipment. A prime example is her request for the U.S. to become a "supporting nation" for the mountain warfare COE. Post recommends that we provide that support.

GHAFARI